



# AREERA State Plans of Work

**T**his Plan of Work (POW) newsletter will focus on the findings of the 2007 Annual Report with general recommendations for improving reporting for the 2008 Annual Report. This newsletter will focus on outcomes.

## Outcomes in the 2007 Annual Report

The outcomes from the 2007 Annual Report have been sorted by CSREES Portfolio and Knowledge Areas (KA) in Excel spreadsheets and published on the CSREES Plan of Work Software website at:

<http://pow.csrees.usdas.gov/Outcomes.htm>.

These will begin to give insight on outcomes CSREES is receiving as classified by KA and by CSREES Portfolio. CSREES has already used these outcomes classified by KA in its Portfolio Reviews, evidence of past performance for the Budget, and reports to Congress. This is an interim step on the way to building query tools for these outcomes. We would appreciate your comments on these as we build these query tools.

## Qualitative Outcome Statements

The first glaring problem with many outcomes in the 2007 Annual Report is that many of the qualitative outcome statements are not really outcomes at all. Many times, they are just progress reports on the way to a future outcome. These qualitative outcome text boxes are really for explaining those outcomes that have come to fruition and you would like to see

touted with your stakeholders and funders as true impact statements. What difference are you making with the research and/or extension program? What impact has it made?

Identifying and communicating true public impact in your research, teaching, and extension programs is essential to developing and maintaining the trust and support of your stakeholders. Lawmakers, our stakeholders and the public all ask, "What's the return on investments in land-grant research, extension and teaching?" As communicators, we have to help researchers, faculty and others understand the essence of impact. Too often, they report attendance figures, meetings held, a new grant or recognition for their program as impact. While some of these provide context and fulfill official accountability reporting, none show true impact.

## What is Impact?

Impact is the reportable, quantifiable difference that your program makes in real people's lives. It reports payoffs and benefits to society. The focus is on public benefit.

Impact is change or potential change in one or more key areas:

- Economic.
- Environmental.
- Social.
- Health and well-being.

## How do I Report Impact?

An Impact statement is a brief summary, in lay terms, that:

- Highlights the difference your program is making for the public good.
- Concisely summarizes what you did to achieve this difference.
- Clearly states payoffs to society.
- Answers key questions: So what? Who cares? Why?

An Impact statement is not:

- Just more paperwork.
- A long, detailed report.
- Numbers of people reached, meetings held, acres served. These provide context but, alone, they don't capture the element of change essential to good impact.
- A detailed description of the process or what's been done.
- A list of additional grants, honors, recognition for organizers

Be specific. Report economic, environmental, social or health/well-being impact in terms of:

- Knowledge gained and how that knowledge is applied.
- Behavior or attitude changes.
- Practice or situation changes.
- Results of those behavior, attitude, practice or situation changes.

It is **OK** to leave the qualitative outcome statements blank if they have not yet come to fruition.

## Quantitative State Defined Outcomes

There are some occasions where the measure in an outcome is unclear. The following are examples from state Annual Reports where the measure and the target are unclear what is being measured.

The measure cited is "Improve Soil Health." The actual number cited is 52. What does this mean? 52 what?

Another example of a measure cited is "Agencies, organizations and natural resource professionals have the knowledge, skills and motivation necessary to conduct scientifically valid monitoring of water bodies for invasive species." The actual number cited is 31. What does this mean? 31 what? Are these 31 organizations or 31 invasive species?

Measures need to be written as measurable entities. Such as, "The number of farmers that adopted one or more best management practices to improve soil health." Or, given the number participants in a given program; "The percentage of participating farmers that adopted best management practices to improve soil health."

## Type of Outcome

Another common problem found in the Annual Report is the mislabeling of outcome type. We have found numerous examples of change in knowledge and change in action outcomes that were mislabeled as change in condition outcomes. Please recheck your outcome labels. This is important because CSREES often looks for certain types of outcomes when completing reports for the budget, portfolio reviews, etc. To help us search for these outcomes, we use filters and database queries to find the outcome types we need. Mislabeled outcomes types may cause an excellent outcome to be lost.

## The Next Newsletter

The next newsletter will focus on what you can do to further streamline your Annual Report.

**For more information on the Plan of Work, e-mail the Plan of Work staff at [pow@csrees.usda.gov](mailto:pow@csrees.usda.gov), or call Bart Hewitt, 202-720-0747.**